

approach to fixing the problem, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in the process.

In response to the VA disaster, on the other hand, the President has dispatched just a single staffer to oversee the investigation. This is not acceptable. As Commander in Chief our Armed Forces, the President should be leading the charge to fix this problem, but he hasn't even spoken publicly about it for weeks.

Regardless of the President's inaction, Congress must take immediate step to address this crisis. This week the House of Representatives is taking up a version of Senator RUBIO's bill, the Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act, which would allow the VA Secretary to fire or demote senior executives in the department when warranted.

Private organizations can fire employees who fail to fulfill their responsibilities. We ought to be able to fire officials who fail in their obligation to our veterans.

Yet all we have seen from the VA is the resignation of the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Petzel, who was already planning to retire—hardly the accountability our veterans deserve.

I have introduced a bill to require the VA inspector general to conduct a national investigation into the wait times veterans face. It is essential that we get an idea of the full scope of this problem so we can ensure that it gets fully fixed.

Under my bill the inspector general will have 6 months to investigate and submit a report to Congress. In the meantime, the VA would be forbidden from closing any of its medical facilities.

No facility—not the Hot Springs facility in my State of South Dakota or any other—should be closed unless we make very sure that veterans' care is not going to be affected.

There are other bills this body should be considering as well, including Senator HELLER's bipartisan legislation, to reduce the backlog of veterans' disability claims, and I hope the Senate will take them up quickly.

This crisis can't wait. There is every likelihood that right now—right now—veterans around our country are still failing to receive the care they need. I hope the President of the United States will come to his senses and treat this situation with the seriousness it deserves.

If he won't act, Congress must. It is the very least that we owe our veterans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Georgia.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, this year Congress has not particularly been noted for much of an accomplishment of anything. We have been in clo-

ture atrophy and we have been in political atrophy, but we are about to change that for a day.

I want to pause for a moment and acknowledge the hard work of a number of Members in the House and the Senate on what is known as the Water Resources Development Act, which soon will be on the floor of the Senate, and I understand will be on the floor of the House today for its ratification.

The Water Resources Development Act is the authority of the U.S. Government to move forward on infrastructure across the country.

I congratulate Chairman SHUSTER in the House and Chairman BOXER in the Senate for their hard work on the conference committee.

Ranking Member VITTER has been an untold hero for us and working hard for the Senate.

I give thanks to Sylvia Burwell of the OMB. She has been a lifesaver for us on the Port of Savannah. I appreciate her cooperation and her help.

I thank Vice President BIDEN. We did a tour of ports on the east coast of the United States to focus on the importance of improving our infrastructure.

In this WRDA bill are improvements across the country, but the one I want to talk about for a second is an example of why infrastructure is so important, and that is expansion of the Savannah Harbor and the deepening project in the Savannah at the Port of Savannah. That is a project that was authorized 16 years ago—the year I was elected to the House of Representatives. It was authorized to be built, but it hasn't been expanded for 16 years or authorized for 16 years because of environmental concerns, atmospheric concerns, sometimes funding concerns, and sometimes political apathy concerns. But finally everyone has their act together. NOAA has endorsed it, Fish and Wildlife has endorsed it, the EPA has endorsed it, and the Corps of Engineers has endorsed it.

Thanks to this Water Resources Development Act authorization, a \$706 million project in my State for the southeastern United States will become a reality over the next 5 years.

Why is it important? It is important for this reason. As we sit and talk today, the nation of Panama is widening and deepening the Panama Canal. Within a few months, they are going to be taking through the Panamax ships of the 21st century, ships that can carry not 9,000, not 11,000 but 14,000 containers.

Ports along the east coast of the United States, such as the Port of Savannah, are not able to take that deep of a ship. They will have to wait until high tide to bring it in and then have to wait a day for high tide to come back to take the ship out. That costs money, and it causes people to divert to other ports, to other countries, and it hurts our economy.

Over the next 5 years as we deepen the Savannah River and Savannah Harbor, and as we improve that port, we

are improving the opportunity for the entire southeastern United States to grow, prosper, and be competitive in the 21st century. The Port of Savannah directly contributes to 297,000 jobs in our State. It contributes to 49 of the 50 States on the continental United States. It provides jobs, economic vitality, tax revenues, and prosperity for America. Its time has come.

I am so delighted the Water Resources Development Act is done. I am so delighted that Chairman BOXER, Ranking Member VITTER, and Chairman SHUSTER have put their teams together, dotted the last "i" and crossed the last "t."

I encourage everybody in the Senate to ratify prosperity, employment, and economic development for America. When the bill comes before the Senate, ratify the Water Resources Development Act and that final conference committee report.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. REED. I rise to discuss again the urgent need to restore emergency unemployment insurance.

Like many Americans, I am hopeful about our future but concerned about how the great recession has impacted our fellow Americans, particularly those who have been hit the hardest—the long-term unemployed. These are good people from all walks of life, from all 50 States. They are people who work in a variety of fields, from high tech to manufacturing, from cubicles and offices to plants and factory floors.

Many of them are older and find themselves out of work for the first time in decades. All of them, all 2.78 million of them, lost out on December 28 of last year. While they have been looking for jobs, Congress has failed to do its job and restore unemployment insurance.

Previously, Congress had never let emergency benefits expire when the long-term unemployment rate was so high. Today's long-term unemployment rate is 2.2 percent, and it is still well over the highest rate, 1.3 percent, of previous expirations.

In the past, when the rate was this high for long-term unemployment, we maintained these benefits. This is still an emergency, and we have to maintain these benefits. It still requires our attention and swift bipartisan action.

To the Senate's credit, there has been bipartisan action. Thanks to my Republican colleague from Nevada, Senator DEAN HELLER, and a coalition of 10 Senators—5 Democrats and 5 Republicans—the Senate passed a 5-month extension of these vital benefits that would provide aid to job seekers who have been searching for work for more than 26 weeks. Senators on both sides of the aisle recognize this is the right thing to do for workers and the smart thing to do for our economy.

So the Senate responded and found a path forward, and it was a difficult path. Majority leader HARRY REID dedicated a vast amount of floor time. Our bipartisan coalition reached a true compromise and stuck together on vote after vote. On April 7, 43 days ago, the full Senate approved the measure.

Unfortunately, Speaker BOEHNER and the House Republicans in charge have refused to take up our bipartisan legislation or pass their own extension of these emergency efforts. Because of their obstruction, millions of Americans are hurting.

We need to get our country back to full unemployment. That is the fundamental answer—to place people in jobs.

We have to move the country to a place where all Americans have an opportunity to earn a living and build a better life for their families.

Some may be tempted to look at the latest unemployment numbers and say: Well, see, ending job benefits is working because the numbers seem to be falling.

That notion is simply not supported by the facts. This long-term unemployment problem is still, as I mentioned, of significant proportions, and those are precisely the people who benefit from extended unemployment benefits.

A recent study by the Illinois Department of Employment Security found that four of five Illinois workers who lost long-term unemployment benefits at the end of last year were still without work 2 months later. They are still struggling in a very difficult market.

I would agree with the director of this State agency who says: "Economic conditions should determine when this safety-net program ends, not an arbitrary date on the calendar."

The economic conditions for the long-term unemployed are still perilous, and it is still an emergency. The Speaker's refusal to renew emergency unemployment insurance makes it even harder for struggling Americans to feed their families, and it does nothing to improve our economic outlook.

The Senate-passed bill was fully off-set and included, in fact, deficit reduction. So the idea that it was too expensive doesn't hold water.

The fact that House Republicans are now moving \$300 billion worth of budget-busting tax breaks, many of which flow to corporations, but refuse to renew emergency benefits for job seekers strikes many people, including myself, as not just an unfair double standard but as out of step with what we need to do to get this economy moving forward.

Let me again remind everyone, we had a fully paid-for unemployment extension bill on a bipartisan basis that actually resulted in some deficit reduction and the House has refused to take it up. But in the meantime, they are moving \$300 billion worth of tax cuts and tax breaks over several years, which flow to corporations, and all of it unpaid for.

So for the sake of job seekers in our economy, I hope House Republicans

will stop obstructing emergency aid to job seekers. They need to take up the bipartisan Senate agreement to restore these benefits and work with us on strengthening our economic recovery. Just give the bill an up-or-down vote and give millions of American job seekers the chance to get back on their feet. In fact, I am confident if there were an up-or-down vote it would pass the House. It is fiscally responsible, fully paid for, it provides assistance to people and families who desperately need it, and would help the economic climate in every State in this country.

They can attach measures to the bill if they want. That is their prerogative. But let us go ahead and get a bill passed, and if we need to resolve the bill between the House and Senate, let us do so. Refusing a vote is irresponsible. The American people deserve better, and I hope they will see better in the coming days ahead.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that, notwithstanding the previous order, today, at 5:30 p.m., the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendars No. 521, 622, and 765, and the Senate proceed to vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order listed; that there be 2 minutes for debate prior to each vote, equally divided in the usual form; that any rollcall votes following the first in each series be 10 minutes in duration; further, that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; and that following disposition of these nominations the Senate proceed under the previous order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. What this means is tonight at 5:30 p.m. we could have as many as five rollcall votes. Some of these votes could be confirmed by voice, so we will wait and see about that, so there would be maybe only two rollcall votes, on confirmation of Jeffrey Costa to be a U.S. Circuit Judge for the Fifth Circuit and cloture on Stanley Fischer to be a member of the Federal Reserve Board.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that, notwithstanding rule XXII and the previous order, if cloture is invoked on Calendar No. 768, Fischer, on Wednesday, May 21, 2014, at 12:15 p.m., the Senate proceed to executive session and all postcloture time be expired and the Senate proceed to vote on confirmation of Calendar No. 768, Fischer; further, that following disposition of Calendar No. 768, the Senate be in recess until 2 p.m.; that at 2 p.m., there be 10 minutes for debate, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees prior to a vote on cloture on the nomination of Barron, Calendar No. 576; further, that if cloture is invoked, on Thursday at 2 p.m., all postcloture time be expired and the Senate proceed to vote on confirmation of the Barron nomination with all other remaining provisions of the previous order remaining in effect; finally, that following the cloture vote on the Barron nomination, the Senate proceed to consideration of Calendar Nos. 773, Cook; 774, Daly; 775, Green; and 743, Martinez; and vote on confirmation thereof in the order listed; further, that there be 2 minutes for debate prior to each vote, equally divided in the usual form; that any rollcall votes following the first in each series be 10 minutes in length; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that President Obama be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. With this agreement, on Wednesday, we expect one rollcall vote at 12:15 p.m. on confirmation of the Fischer nomination, and as many as five rollcall votes at 2:10 p.m. We hope all four votes will be by voice, but we have to wait and see.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:39 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

VA HEALTH CARE

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, the steady trickle of allegations surrounding abuses of our veterans has turned from a trickle into a monsoon. It seems every day that goes by there is an additional bad news story about appointment lists that have been